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Land's Academic Meltdown

Posted by Luke Robert Mason on Monday, May 23, 2011 · 1 Comment

Nick Land

Following the release of his collected works, for the first time in over 15 years the audio performance of Nick Land's seminal paper *Meltdown* is available to listen to on the web.

Nick Land - Meltdown
Original audio tape from the archive of Dan O'Hara

"Purportedly they mimic the effects of LSD, crack, heroin and other hard drugs," read the hilarious July 2010 reports of the digital drug craze 'i-dosers.' Specialised moods or experiences could be simulated through a range of binaural MP3′s distributed by underground digital dealers. As a storm of videos hit YouTube, supposedly showing teenagers across the US writhing in semi-eplieptic fits, the dangers of the digital download echoed throughout cyberspace as our children got high on hyperlinks.

Despite the hype and media frenzy it was widely agreed that these binary hallucinogens were a hoax. But it is hard to ignore the sonic parallels these 'digital doses' have to Nick Land's 26 minute *Meltdown*, a track made available here for the first time on the net – arguably its natural home.

Fifteen years before the 'i-doser' reports hit the mainstream press a group of renegade academics at the University of Warwick were challenging their own experiences of cyberspace as an addictive substance. These explorations were both theoretical and more importantly practical.

The experimentation was led by philosophy lecturer Nick Land, an academic who took great pleasure in introducing himself as 'working in the field of The Collapse of Western Civilisation Studies.'

The students who studied with Land during his time at Warwick esteem him with almost cult status and, although many have now moved on to become professors, authors and academics in their own right, they are unafraid to rank him as one of the most important British philosophers of the last 20 years.

A man of philosophical rigour and coherence or drug-injured and delusional? Make what you want of Land. Although it is hard not to respect his approach to academia that embraces a sort of 'theory-fiction.' Indeed this recording of *Meltdown* highlights Lands influence not just in philosophy but also music – something Mark Fisher recently looked at in his article 'Mind Games.'

For a more-indepth portrait of Land's academic output, Robin MacKay and Ray Brassier's recent edited collection, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, is a must read. However, many would argue that only in performance, do these truly extraordinary texts posit their importance. Either read conceptually or admired aesthetically MacKay and Brassier's beautifully-edited collection can only give part-insight into work that was both inflicted by and infected with the anti-disciplinary ethos that permeated the hard lined 60′s architecture of the University of Warwick in the mid-90s.

Meltdown as a defining statement of the redundancy of Western humanism, is beyond comparison. If you compare the seminal prose of Land's only publicly available manuscript, *The Thirst for Annihilation* with what you get in *Meltdown* it becomes clear that the original authentic author is slit across numerous sources. As 1994, '95 and '96 VF organiser Dan O'Hara shared, "in *Meltdown* the scifi vocabulary is O(rphan)d(rift>), the politics is Sadie [Plant], the rigour is Nick [Land]. Except even that summary is a bit off."

Maggie Roberts (aka Mer 0d), one of the founding members of O(rphan)d(rift>), noted that despite their technical contributions to the work the, "inhuman devices were channelled, as always, by the brilliant mind [of Land]." These 'devices' are best described by Simon Reynolds as overtones of, "morbid glee intensified to an apocalyptic pitch. There seems to be a perverse and literally anti-humanist identification with the 'dark will' of capital and technology, as it 'rips up political cultures, deletes traditions, dissolves subjectivities.'"

Of course Land also has his critics, those who describe him, 'a grown man pretending to be Dr. Mabuse proclaiming jaw-dropping logical solecism in lieu of argument.' Equally *Meltdown* has been critiqued for it's 'maximum slogan density' and impressive-sounding jargon wrenched from its context. With interpretations ranging from a libidinocosmic fatum, laughing in the face of puny, mere human politicking, to *Meltdown* as a *political desideratum* asking why humanity would ever politically organise specifically for the sake of its own obliteration.

This year the focus of Virtual Futures has, in part, moved away from Landianism in favour of artistic explorations of virtual reality and bio-hacking. One reason for this is that the revival exists during a time where political pessimism no longer equals intensive fatalism – not yet anyway. What the revival *does* borrow from Land, however, is a want to libidimise academia, to free it from its traditional constructs and to remould the methods through which we receive information – themes which the audio-recording of *Meltdown* encapsulate. Indeed this year we have a couple of surprises in store, we cannot promise that you will be 'jacking-in' to the conference and downloading the talks into your neural cortex, but we can promise that this will be unlike any academic conference you have ever attended (unless you were at VF 95, of course).

Surprisingly the audio tapes have maintained their binaural quality and for a truly authentic experience I suggest you head down to the University of Warwick's seldom used brick lined ex-TV Studio, located in the Humanities Building, where you can sit in complete darkness and play this across four ghetto blasters.

In the meantime, wire up, jack in, lie back and enjoy the 26 minute trip that is *Meltdown*.

Further Reading

MacKay, Robin & Brassier, Ray eds. (2011) *Fanged Norumena: Collected Writings of Nick Land 1987-2007 (Urbanomic)*

Fisher, Mark (2011) 'Mind Games' in Dazed and Confused Vol.II 97 May 2011 pp. 90-91

Turner, Jenny (1995) 'Travels in Cyberspace' in The Guardian Weekend – March 18 1995 pp. 28-34

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